

124
THE RELATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO PHYSICAL LAWS.

A

DISCOURSE

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BY

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DISCOURSE.

GENTLEMEN OF THE PORTER RHETORICAL SOCIETY:

It is with no slight distrust of my ability to meet the demands of the occasion, that I appear before you this afternoon. My professional pursuits have been so diverse from those in which you are about to engage, and at the same time so engrossing, that I can hope to have little to offer that may be worthy of your interest or attention. Matter, under its different forms and in its various reactions, has been the chief subject of my daily study and meditation; while for you the higher endowments of mind spread out their rich and varied attractions.

But though the chosen fields of our respective labors be apparently separated from one another by so wide an interval, there is a point of view from which they are seen to approach, and, laying aside their distinctive features, blend into common ground. The same Being who created mind, with its mysterious and wonderful powers, also created matter, with powers scarcely less mysterious and wonderful. Both

are alike the work of God ; both alike reflect His attributes ; and both are employed by Him as *instruments* in the accomplishment of His wise and good purposes. In ministering thus to the respective ends of their creation, both obey certain established laws, which, as they originated alike in His appointment, are alike expressions of His will. Contemplated, therefore, from this higher point of view, these two departments of the Divine handiwork, instead of presenting themselves under relations of contrast and opposition, appear only as different parts of the same great whole ; and it would seem scarcely possible that he who is truly interested in the study of one, should not desire to gain some knowledge of the other ; that just conceptions of the leading features of one, should not assist in the right understanding of the other.

Nay, further ; the world of matter and the world of mind are not in a state of isolation. They do not present two distinct and parallel series of phenomena. On the contrary, they come at innumerable points into the closest relationship, and are continually acting and reacting upon one another ; so that we can hardly hope to arrive at a true idea of the scheme or plan of either, by the study of that alone.

But though conceived by the same mind, and formed by the same hand, and employed together under analogous laws, in carrying out the same designs, there is this remarkable difference observable in respect to them. Matter appears always as a means, and never as an end. It is everywhere ministrant to mind, and accomplishes the sole object of its existence in such ministration. This is true of it, whether

in its more humble, or its sublimer offices ; whether forming and endowing an eye, or building up a planet ; whether assistant to thought and responsive to will in the delicate organism of the brain, or in huge and ponderous masses giving stability to the universe. Mind, on the other hand, though frequently employed as a means, is itself an end ; and in its higher and nobler developments, *the end* for which the entire organic and physical creations were called into being.

From this subordinate and tributary relation, which the material everywhere holds to the spiritual, I think we may derive an important suggestion and lesson. As the former does not exist for itself, so we should not rest in our knowledge of its laws as an end, but seek to render such knowledge subservient to ulterior and spiritual interests. Indeed, every application of the results of material investigation to the supply of human wants or the multiplication of human enjoyments, is an illustration and instance of this ; and of the extent to which such applications have been made and of the great social changes effected by them, the miracles of our modern civilization are a perpetual witness. But however vast the productive resources opened by a knowledge of physical laws, or however important may be the influence exerted by such knowledge in shaping the developments of society, and determining man's ultimate condition on the earth, no reflective mind can fail to regard as of far greater moment its influence upon the destinies of the race, in that world to whose everlasting abodes, after a brief sojourn here, its successive generations are transferred.

Believing, therefore, the highest and best uses of material science to be in subserving man's needs as an immortal and accountable being, and recognizing the obligation of every Christian, whatever his walk in life, to consecrate his acquisitions, so far as he may be able, to the advancement of Christ's kingdom, I have thought that I could not more appropriately occupy the present hour, than by a review of the bearings of some of the results of modern investigation upon the teachings of Religion. And as the field thus opened is a very broad one, by far too broad to be included within the limits assigned by the occasion, I have deemed it expedient to narrow the view, and confine my observations to the relation of certain known organic and physical laws to a single Christian doctrine,—the doctrine of a Divine Providence, directing the course of human events.

That such a doctrine is taught in the Sacred Scriptures, no man who has attentively perused them, can entertain a doubt. Nor is there anything in the constitution of Nature, so far as revealed to us, by the discoveries of science, at all at variance with it. On the contrary, the numerous beneficent provisions so visible in the physical arrangements of our world, would alone create an antecedent probability that its moral welfare would be equally provided for. The only inquiries in relation to this subject, therefore, that can arise in the minds of any, must be as to the MODE and EXTENT of God's providence—the FACT being too clearly revealed in the Bible, and too strongly supported also, by great and wide-spreading analogies, to admit of question or doubt. To

these inquiries, I propose to see what answers, the character of the Divine government in the natural world, together with the actual course of human events, may furnish. In selecting such a theme, I am aware that I may be thought to encroach upon the domain of theology—and that in the presence of those at whose feet it would become me, and I should certainly esteem it a high privilege, to sit for instruction. But I trust that the considerations to which I have adverted, will be deemed sufficient to shield me from the charge of presumption.

In what way then, or in what ways may we conceive the Supreme Being to exercise that control over human affairs, which is implied in the idea of Providence? So far as they depend upon human agency there is no difficulty. Besides having formed men, He immediately operates upon their hearts, by the influence of His Holy Spirit. He has only to touch, here, the springs of feeling, and desire and action, and these flow out in accordance with His most perfect will.

But there are other agencies, which mingle with those of man, in determining his condition and shaping his destinies. Over many of these he has not even an indirect control. They are essential parts of that sublime mechanism by which the order and harmony and beauty of the outward world are constantly maintained. Of this class, are the rain and the sunshine, the winds and the tempests, the earthquake and the volcano. These acknowledge no human control, and can therefore be rendered subservient to God's purposes, through no human

instrumentalities. In what manner, then, may we suppose these physical agencies to be wrought into the economy of his Providence? How can they be so shaped, as where they touch upon human interests, to meet the exigencies of character, and thus answer the ends of a righteous government? Shall we suppose the elements of nature, like the hearts of men, to be immediately acted upon by God? Touching with the finger of His power these sources of all material phenomena, does He cause the latter to flow out in subservience to His moral purposes? Back of the chain of antecedents and consequents, by which physical events are bound together, may we not suppose an influence exerted, moulding and determining their character, without at the same time disturbing the order of their succession? Behind the machinery of second causes, which alone meets the eye, may not the great First Cause be continually operating, and evolving the changes of the physical world, in harmony with the moral? This view of the subject, although frequently presented, is, I think, attended with grave difficulties.

In the first place, these physical agents have certain specific offices assigned them in the economy of nature, upon the due performance of which, the stability and perpetuity of the existing order of things depend. By their combined and ceaseless action, they furnish appropriate spheres and conditions of existence to the innumerable tribes of plants and animals by which the earth is tenanted; and thus preserve it continually in a habitable and inhabited state. This is the great end for which they

were constituted, and to which they are unceasingly ministering. Now it is not easy to see how these agencies can be diverted from their obvious design, as parts of the mechanism of the outward world, without disturbance of the order and harmony of nature. It is not easy to understand how the material elements are able to maintain, by their ceaseless action, that sublime progression of physical events, denominated the course of nature — than which nothing can be more fixed — and at the same time by continually varying manifestations of power, adapt their relations to human interests, so as to subserve the ends of a righteous government.

In the second place, the supposition is at variance with the clearest and most unquestioned teachings of physical science.

To place this fact in a clear light, it is only necessary to recall the CONDITIONS under which the forces appearing in connection with matter are alone manifested. These are essentially the same, whatever the kind of force, or whatever the substance evolving it. They consist of certain PHYSICAL RELATIONS, dependent, for the most part, upon the nature and proximity of the bodies in reaction. In the case of one of these forces — chemical affinity — temperature and electrical state also enter in as essential conditions of its development. When the relations, thus conditioning any phenomenon, have arisen, whether in the course of nature, or through human agency, the phenomenon occurs — no matter what the attendant circumstances ; and it occurs only on the emergence of these relations.

Of this primary law of physical causation, illustrations present themselves on every side. We may take the explosion of gunpowder as one of the most familiar as well as the most striking. Here the application of a match or other heated body supplies the last of the conditions necessary to a display of atomic energy ; the other conditions have already been secured, in the composition of the powder itself. The right elements are there, and by long continued trituration they have been properly commingled, and brought into the requisite nearness to one another. There is now wanting to determine their reaction only the required temperature. When this is supplied, no matter by what hand, no matter for what purpose, in all presence, under all circumstances, the explosion follows. No worth can stay it. No prayers delay it. The elements upon whose action it depends, recognize no moral distinctions — obey no moral laws. They destroy as readily and as remorselessly, the innocent, as the guilty. They are insensible to every motive of humanity — deaf to every consideration of hope or fear, duty, interest, affection or pity. Their display of energy is determined solely by physical relations, and is as certain under these relations, and as unvarying as the motion of the earth on its axis, or round the sun.

But what may we suppose to be the origin of the forces so suddenly evolved in the explosion of the powder? Not the rise of temperature produced by the contact of the heated body. That is only a condition of their manifestation. Not the previously secured commixture and proximity of the atoms of

oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, sulphur, and potassium, entering into its composition. This is only another condition of their manifestation. The true source of the power exhibited, is the atoms themselves. These by virtue of their constitutional affinities have entered into union and thereby determined an instantaneous evolution of gasses. Whether these atoms have more than a hypothetical existence — whether they be anything but minute spheres of space constantly irradiated by the Divine energy — or whether, granting them a real existence and proper endowments, they are not each moment dependent for the continuance of these, upon the sustaining power of the Deity, I shall not stop to inquire. These are questions of a purely speculative character, concerning which it is probable that different minds will always think differently. Nor is their decision of any importance in the present inquiry. It is only the phenomena and the conditions under which they arise, that we have to consider; and these remain the same, whatever theory we may adopt for explaining them. The explosion has occurred from the reaction of certain minute particles of matter, or globules of force, or spheres of energy — designate and conceive them as we may — under purely physical relations; and from a like reaction under similar relations, it is found always to occur.

And what is the earth but a huge mass of powder? varying indeed at different points in composition and qualities, but everywhere formed of elements intensely reactive. In one part these elements are more variously and more intimately commingled,

and the powder is proportionally quicker and more energetic. In another part the commixture is less perfect, and the composition less favorable to promptness and vigor of action. Here the constituent materials present themselves, in the liquid, or gaseous, instead of the solid state. There they come together and react with one another in all the three states assumed by matter. They appear in compositions as various, and under forms as diversified as the ends which they subserve in the terrestrial economy. But in all their states, under all their forms, they exhibit in every essential particular both the mechanical and the chemical type of the substance which we have just considered.

And as in the case of that substance, there is no display of force, until its slumbering energies are roused by the touch of fire; so here every exhibition of power is regulated and determined by temperature. The solar heat and light, distributed to the different parts of the earth in measures as exact as its own diurnal and annual motions, are the immediate cause of all the activities of which it is the theatre. Withdraw the influence of these, and the different elements, now so agitated and restless, would sink into profound and unbroken repose. There would be the powder without the heat to quicken it into action.

The changes of external nature, therefore, however diversified in character, are determined by conditions as precise, and as purely physical, as the simplest chemical phenomenon — conditions found partly in the constitution of the globe itself and partly in the relations which it holds to the sun.

The elements upon which they depend, like the sulphur, charcoal and salt petre, ignore all moral laws — are deaf to every claim of piety or virtue or humanity. The earthquake and the volcano destroy as indiscriminately, and as remorselessly as the cannon. The lightnings, the tempests and the billows, heed as little the cries of innocence, or the pleadings of affection. The mighty procession of events, in the natural world, moves forward in stern and uncompromising order — regardless of human wishes — regardless of the vicissitudes of human condition. Whole generations of men pass away, and their places are filled by others; while its course knows no change. Having its august rise in the constitution and physical arrangements of the globe, dependent at each step of its sublime march upon material agencies, it can no more be turned from its path, without disturbance of natural laws, than the ball leaping from the mouth of the exploding cannon.

In the third place, I do not think that the experience of mankind affords evidence of a special relation, in physical events, to the character of the individuals or nations principally affected by them, except when such events have been manifestly supernatural.* I do not believe that a careful collection of statistics on this subject would show, or render probable even, that the agencies of the natural world

* It will be observed that the question here, is not whether the course of events in the natural world was pre-arranged in view of the requirements of man's moral probation, but whether the Divine power is continually interposed in altering that arrangement to meet emergencies not provided for in it.

are directly employed by God in the administration of His moral government. I do not believe it would be found that as the inhabitants of any district or province have become more virtuous and more Christian, the elements of nature have shown themselves more kindly and beneficent — that the sun has shed his rays more genially — the clouds poured out their waters more abundantly or more uniformly — and the earth yielded its fruits in greater profusion, and with less labor from the husbandman. I do not believe it would be found, that as this same people have declined in virtue and piety, the heats have become more parching, the droughts more withering, the frosts more blighting, and the tempests more devastating. And yet it is in cases like this, if in any, that we should look for an interposition of the Divine power in bringing the natural world into relation with the moral. Occasionally, in the course of physical events, there are marked occurrences, which might seem to be specially ordered. But in by far the greater number of instances, there is nothing observable to indicate moral design or purpose. Nay, it not unfrequently happens, that the relation of the event to the character is exactly the reverse of what we should have anticipated. Hence those who believe the changes of the natural world to be immediately ordered with reference to moral ends, usually find about the same number of striking, and of mysterious Providences. Indeed, the same occurrence assumes, in the view of such persons, either the one or the other character, according to the side from which they contemplate it.

A few years ago, a rudely formed boat pushed out from one of the wharfs of Calcutta, and after some days sail on the broad bosom of the Ganges and the Bay of Bengal, entered the waters of the Brahmaputra. It was bound for Sadaiya, one of the principal towns of Assam, far up the river, near the foot of the Himmalah mountains. In it were two missionaries of the cross, who counted not their lives dear unto themselves, that they might win souls to Christ. They had come from a far distant country, and were bearing the light and knowledge and blessings of the gospel to that still remote and benighted land. For many weeks their voyage was prosperous, and their hearts beat high with hope and Christian zeal. At length, when they had well-nigh accomplished it, when they were already near the scene of their expected labors, one of these devoted servants of Christ was stricken down by sore illness. The other hastened forward in a smaller boat to procure, if possible, medical assistance. Urged on by every motive which humanity, friendship, and piety could offer, he was within sight of the mission premises at the town whither they were going, when suddenly two trees, whose connection with the adjacent bank the winds and the stream had loosened, falling upon the boat and crushing it to pieces, he sank beneath the waters, and that heart, so true to all its obligations, was stilled forever. To the friends of the missionary and of the mission the event was a dark and mysterious Providence. To the devotees of Budh, it was a manifest interposition of their Deity, in pro-

tection of the faith which the infidel stranger had come to subvert and destroy.

On the 16th of August, 1688, there lay in the harbor of Helvoetsluys more than six hundred vessels, — transports and ships of war — waiting for an easterly wind to bear them to the neighboring coast of England. One of these vessels bore a flag on whose ample folds was embroidered the motto, “I will maintain the Liberties of England and the Protestant religion.” In it was William, Prince of Orange. On the evening of the 19th the entire armament weighed anchor and spread its sails to a favoring breeze. Before, however, half the distance between the two coasts had been traversed, a violent storm arose, which broke up and scattered the fleet.

When tidings of the disaster reached the ears of King James, whose religion and crown the expedition threatened, he recognized in it a Divine interposition, in answer to the prayers of his Catholic subjects. “What wonder,” he said devoutly, “since the Host has been exposed for several days.” To many of the Protestants, who were looking to William and his noble armament for the protection of their liberties and their faith, its dispersion by the tempest, when approaching their coast, was a dark and inscrutable providence. William himself, however, interpreted the disaster differently. He saw in it only the work of adverse elements. Collecting the scattered vessels and repairing the injuries which they had received, he prepared for renewing the expedition. With undaunted courage, a second time

he committed his fortunes to the waves ; and now, after a four days' sail under a smiling sky and with favoring breezes, the whole armament rode safe in the harbor of Tor Bay. During the disembarkation, the water of the Bay was as smooth as glass. But no sooner had the landing been effected, than the wind rose from the west, and swelling into a fierce gale, drove back King James's fleet, already in close pursuit. It was now the Protestants' turn to claim the favor of Heaven. Many of them, "men of more piety than judgment," says Macaulay, "fully believed that the ordinary laws of nature had been suspended for the liberties and religion of England. Exactly a hundred years before, they said, the Armada, invincible by man, had been scattered by the wrath of God. Civil freedom and divine truth were again in jeopardy ; and again the obedient elements had fought for the good cause. The wind had blown strong from the east while the Prince wished to sail down the channel, had turned to the south when he wished to enter Tor Bay, had sunk to a calm during the disembarkation, and as soon as the disembarkation was completed, had risen to a storm and met the pursuers in the face." In all this King James saw only the hostility of the elements.

It is said that a former distinguished New England divine, who recognized only two agencies in nature—one of God and one of the prince of the power of the air—ascribed to the latter the direction of the thunder-bolt. He could not understand, otherwise, why churches should be so favorite a mark for the artillery of the heavens.

The combination of piety and egoism, which among Protestants appears in the multiplication of providences, under the stronger and more ready faith of Romanism, shows itself in the frequency of miracles. A mere modification of natural phenomena, by a power acting behind the laws that govern them, is not sufficient to mark with due emphasis, the divine approbation or the divine displeasure. The laws must be set aside, and the phenomena evolved independently of them. The blood of the martyred saint, sacredly treasured through centuries, annually liquefies, betokening by the readiness with which it flows the smiles or the wrath of heaven. The silken veil of a Christian maiden, who had preferred the fagot to denying her Lord, turns aside the burning stream of lava, and saves from destruction the town which it threatened. The plague is miraculously cured at the tomb of a saint, and a whole city even is saved from its ravages by his effigy borne through the streets. The fires of the stake are quenched at the touch of the holy martyr; lions crouch as meek as lambs at his feet; and even the wounds which the unrelenting sword, or still more cruel instruments of torture, have inflicted, angels are sent with celestial medicines to assuage and heal.

These Catholic miracles, though more imposing to the imagination, are not more repugnant to reason and experience, than many of the providences as generally claimed by Protestants; the latter, when stripped of the graceful veil of unmeaning words, which is commonly thrown about them, are seen to imply as really a suspension or modification of nat-

ural laws, while the circumstances under which they are supposed to occur, are often far less dignified and worthy. Even the narrowest and most humble interests not unfrequently furnish occasions for them. I remember a good woman — and I doubt not you will all recall similar instances — who though not precisely a Saint Agnes, believed herself to be equally the object of God's special regard. Having escaped one day from a shower which overtook her husband, she saw in this a proof of the watch-care of Heaven. "The Lord knew," she said, "that she was a poor frail creature, and held back the rain till she reached a shelter. Her husband," she added, "was strong and able to bear it" — forgetting apparently that there might be others beside herself and him exposed to the storm.

The same disposition to regard occurrences in the physical world — especially if unusual — as significant of the divine will, is equally apparent in heathen as in Christian nations. The ancient Romans never engaged in any important enterprise without first consulting the auspices. Even a consular election was void, if these were unfavorable. The most momentous questions in peace and in war, were decided by the flight of birds or the feeding of chickens. The gods not only made known in these ways their will, but if propitious, rendered their worshippers the most open and substantial aids. The armies of Greece and Troy marched to battle under the guidance and auspices of contending deities. These respectively lent force and edge to their weapons, and as far as possible turned the elements in their favor, and according as Juno or

Venus was more skilful in stratagem, or wiser in counsel, or more prevalent in her intercessions with Jupiter, did the success of their arms vary.

Human nature is the same now as then. Circumstances alone are altered. Christian nations go to war with one another under banners inscribed to the same God, invoking the protection and blessing of the same Heaven, and seeing indications of its favor, as in the vicissitudes of a campaign, victory perches, now upon one standard and now upon the other. For the intercession of gods and goddesses, are substituted the mediation of saints and the prayers of the church.

The theatre of these Divine interpositions, has, it is true, been somewhat narrowed by the discoveries of modern science. The sun “in dim eclipse,” no longer “sheds disastrous twilight on half the nations,” or “with fear of change perplexes monarchs.” Nor does the comet firing

“ The length of Ophiucus huge
In th’ Arctic sky,”

shake “from his horrid hair pestilence and war.” Nor is the sin of our first parents now believed to have turned

“ Askance
The poles of earth twice ten degrees and more
From the sun’s axle,”

causing thus, “pinching cold” and “scorching heat,” instead of “spring perpetual” “smiling with vernant flowers.” It is owing to this obliquity of the earth’s axis, — as a larger knowledge of the physical arrangements of our planet has disclosed — that summer with

its waving harvests and its ripening fruits, visits in turn every zone. Without it neither Ceres nor Pomona would bestow their gifts, except along two narrow belts on either side of the tropics. The earthquake and the volcano, so long regarded only as fearful indications of the wrath of Heaven, are now known to be connected with agencies designed for the conservation of the globe. But for these agencies the earth would long ere this have become a second time formless and void — without inhabitants, and uninhabitable. The lightnings are now known to obey the ordinary law of material attraction, and their frequent descent upon churches finds an explanation in physical instead of moral causes.

When the science of meteorology shall have been as fully developed as that of astronomy — when the cycles of the atmospheric changes shall have been as accurately determined as the revolutions of the planets, the winds and the weather will cease to be regarded as subjects for the Divine interposition. There will still remain, however, other portions of nature yet unexplored by science, where the same tendency of the human mind will find opportunity and scope enough for its exhibition.

The disposition to ascribe moral significance to the ordinary occurrences of the natural world, has its origin in two opposite poles in the nature of man. Its first and deepest source is in a spontaneous, universal belief in the justice of God, joined with an equally universal conviction of human depravity and guilt. Reasoning from these admitted premises, man-

kind have in all ages concluded that the various forms of physical evil so prevalent in our world, are, at the same time, the consequence and the punishment of sin.* This conclusion they have adopted, without at all investigating the true origin or proper connections of these evils, or inquiring whether such be in reality the way in which it has pleased the supreme Ruler of the universe to manifest and exercise his high attribute of justice. As a corollary from this general conclusion, it is inferred that any unusual or peculiar form of evil must have relation to peculiar depravity of character. It is also expected, on the same ground, that acts of extraordinary wickedness will be marked by outward and visible tokens of the Divine displeasure.

To correct this fallacy, so native to the human heart, the Book of Job would seem to have been specially written; or rather the history of the Patriarch, specially recorded. Our Saviour also repeatedly meets it in his teachings, both to the Jews and to his disciples. "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all Galileans, because they suffered such things?" "Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" "Neither did this man sin or his parents that he was born blind." "God causeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain upon the just and the unjust." That many of the evils of life are wholly irrespective of desert — that they are depend-

* See Appendix, Note A.

ent upon physical and organic, and not upon moral laws, — would seem sufficiently evident from their being shared in common by man and the lower orders of the animal creation.

The other principal source of the multiplication of providences is SELF-LOVE. This, indeed, arrays the human heart in enmity against God, so long as its cherished desires and purposes are in opposition to his known will. But when these have been changed and brought into harmony with the will of God, the same principle, still operative, awakens the hope and expectation of His favor. This, chastened and purified and exalted by true and adequate conceptions of the Divine character, takes the form of a sublime faith — the natural and necessary product of a soul in its proper relation to God, with a just and full comprehension of that relation.

When, however, there is a larger infusion of the element of self, with less worthy views of God's character, the piety assumes a more egoistic type and proportionally greater demands are made upon His care and protection. That wise and good Providence, which He continually exercises over all the creatures of His power, is no longer sufficient. Everything in nature as well as in human society, must minister to the safety and welfare of the favorite of Heaven. The winds are commanded to blow gently upon him. The lightnings and the tempests are charged to do him no harm. The sun is withheld from smiting him by day, and the moon by night. Disease and misfortune and calamity are turned from his dwelling, or if permitted to enter, they come

not as ministers of wrath, but as angels of mercy, bearing with them hidden blessings. Every event is ordered with reference to his interests, and made tributary to his good. His conception of the Creator and Governor of the Universe, would seem to include little beyond the idea of an All-powerful Being, constantly attendant upon his steps, defending him on every side from accident and harm, holding over him continually the shield of his protecting power, and personally ministering to all—even the most minute and trivial of his wants. The same care is supposed to be extended—in a less degree indeed, to all the objects in which self is interested—over which by a ready and natural expansion it spreads itself. Family, friends, brethren of same faith, kindred and country severally, come in for their due share of the Divine favor.

That many of the ordinarily supposed providences, are mere reflections of this lively interest which every man feels in his own personal welfare, I think no reflective mind can doubt. Indeed such would seem but a natural inference, from the almost universal observation that these providences are seen only in events favoring the hopes, wishes, or interests of the persons immediately affected, and are seen by them alone. King James, though instantly recognizing the Divine Hand in the storm which scattered the fleet of William, perceived not its agency in the wind which afterwards bore the same fleet into Tor Bay. The husband of the good woman, whose pious emotions were so deeply stirred by the interposition of Heaven in her deliverance from the perils

of the weather, was, I apprehend, less strongly impressed with the clear and striking character of the Providence. These personal interpretations of occurrences arising in the ordinary course of nature, and from causes purely physical, can only be reckoned among the many illusions which self-love imposes upon the understanding; and as such they furnish another illustration, were it needed, of the truth that the human heart is deceitful above all things, even after it has ceased to be desperately wicked.

Besides conscience and self-love, there is a certain exaltation of religious sentiment, which, during its continuance, is a source of erroneous and illusory ideas of the Divine agency in the outward world. When the soul is in immediate communion with God — when its whole powers are absorbed and lost in the sublime contemplation of His being and attributes — when it is borne down and overwhelmed by the conception of His power and majesty and greatness, it for a time loses all perception of aught but Him. The intervening curtain and drapery of second causes is now withdrawn. Neither outward form, nor material law, nor physical agent is recognized. The vast and ponderous frame-work of the universe dissolves and disappears. Nature and humanity fade away, and its own being even is lost in the rapt vision of Deity. There remain only God and the soul, — the former everywhere surrounding, and most intimately pervading the latter.

It is not in an emotional state, like this, I hardly need say, that we should look to the mind for just

ideas of the outward world, or of its own relations to it. It is only when all its powers are in due and harmonious exercise, that its judgments are entitled to our confidence, as bearing the constitutional guaranties of truth.

For a true idea of the mode of the Divine Government in the natural world, we must go back to the original constitution of our planet, of which all its successive phases have been mere explications. In this primitive synthesis of material elements, or of immaterial laws — as we choose to regard it — must provision have been made, not only for the accommodation and sustenance of man, as a physical, but for his probation as a moral and religious being. How far these provisions may have reached — whether they simply secured for mankind generally, suitable means and opportunities for moral culture and improvement, or whether they extended to every event and circumstance of the life of every individual, I do not now inquire. So far, however, as such events and circumstances are included in God's Providence, we must suppose them, in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, to have been ordered and determined before the foundation of the world.

There are THREE WAYS, then, in which the power of the Divine Being, within the forms to which He has astricted its manifestation, may be exerted in directing the course of human events: remotely and indirectly through the organization and physical arrangements of the outward world;* more nearly, through the

* See Appendix, Note B.

constitution and endowments of each human being, whether immediately conferred, or transmitted by hereditary descent from the original progenitor of the race; and yet more nearly by the direct influence exerted upon the hearts and consciences of men by His Holy Spirit.* By the union of these several modes in its administration, there is secured to the Divine government, at the same time, firmness and flexibility. While neither moral nor physical law bends to circumstances, the government, through the third and variable element embodied in it, adapts itself to all the requirements of our moral and religious probation. Whatever ends, necessary to such probation, are not attained by constitutional provisions, are secured by the direct interposition of His Spirit. Although the avalanche pause not in its precipitous descent, the traveller may be removed from the place overwhelmed by it. Although the tempest sweep onward, abating not a jot its fury, the vessel may be turned from its track, and reach in safety the desired haven. Although the human will may cease not to obey the law of the strongest motive, the whole course of action may be changed, and a life of sin and disobedience give place to one of piety.

How FAR, in these several ways—it remains to inquire—may we suppose provision to be made for the moral and physical events actually occurring in our world? Or, in other words, what may we suppose to be the extent of the Divine Providence? How comprehensive is it?

* See Appendix, Note C.

In considering this question, it is necessary to distinguish carefully, between the PURPOSED and the ACTUAL — between the END PROPOSED, and COLLATERAL RESULTS flowing incidentally from the means employed in attaining it — between the REAL and ESSENTIAL, and the OUTWARD, and often VARIABLE FORM, under which it is presented. All the events of which the earth has been the theatre, moral as well as physical, have proceeded from God. They were all foreknown to Him at the time of its creation, as destined to follow from the laws under which He placed it. It was in the light of such foreknowledge, that its actual constitution was adopted. It was adopted because it was seen to be best fitted for securing the Divine ends, or because in plan or in execution, or in both, it was most congenial to the Divine nature.* But we may not infer from this, that every thing in our world is alike pleasing to God; that every thing was alike provided for and intended by Him; that it was the

* The word Providence is used in two different senses, which, to avoid confusion, it is important to discriminate. In its wider and more general signification, the whole course of human actions and events — every thing which has transpired in our world — may be said to be included in God's Providence; inasmuch as all has proceeded from the constitution of things which He established, and must from the beginning have been foreseen by Him. In this sense every occurrence in life may, with propriety, be spoken of as providential. Accidents originating in the grossest carelessness, death, although by the hand of the assassin, may still be regarded as providential.

In its narrower signification, the word is used to denote a system of special provisions for securing certain definite and specific ends. In this stronger sense, only that which is directly provided for, which is the object of contrivance and design and purpose, can be said to be embraced in the Divine Providence. It is hardly necessary to say, that it is in this latter sense that the term is to be understood in the present discussion.

direct object of contrivance and purpose. Such a conclusion would be at variance with every human analogy. It would, moreover, annihilate the distinction between good and evil, and render the Divine character a sphinx-like enigma, dark and difficult, beyond all hope of solution. We must suppose some things to hold the place of ENDS in the constitution and government of the world, and others to be the ACTUAL and FORESEEN, but not DESIRED or NECESSARY CONSEQUENCES, it may be, of the plan adopted for their attainment. The innumerable diseases which "flesh is heir to," flow from organic provisions, looking only to health and enjoyment. Every form of transgression proceeds from endowments of reason, affection, and will, intended to qualify, and actually qualifying for high and virtuous action. To suppose either suffering or sin the object of design on the part of the Creator, or in itself pleasing to Him, is not more repugnant to every right sentiment, than it is inconsistent with the remedial provisions so generally introduced for their alleviation or cure. Only good and worthy ends can, therefore, be embraced in the Divine Providence.

But of that which is BENEFICENT in the natural, and RIGHT in the moral world, what part may we suppose to have been specially provided for, and what to have arisen under the influence of general laws? The shower of yesterday, which watered and refreshed my fields — was it the subject of a Divine purpose? was there a reason in the Divine mind why it should be sent to my fields rather than to my neighbor's, which were equally parched and thirsty?

I do not ask whether it was foreseen by God at the time of the creation, as a necessary consequence of the laws which he then established; or whether the wisdom of these laws was determined, and the system adopted, from their perceived bearings upon the interests of every part of His universe; but whether, in framing the laws, distinct and special reference was had to that shower? The charitable act of the good Samaritan—did it spring from an endowment of nature, conferred with a direct view to that act, as an end? Or was it determined by the immediate influence of God's Holy Spirit? Or may we rather suppose it to have proceeded from a benevolence of disposition, prompting the possessor not only to that, but to a multitude of other kind and good actions? These are questions which it is not easy—perhaps not possible, to answer in a satisfactory manner. Some light, however, may possibly be thrown upon them by the analogy of God's Providence in the physical development of our planet.

It is now known, from the investigations of the geologist, as well as from the Mosaic record, that the earth has not always existed in its present state. The time was, as we learn from both of these sources, when its entire surface lay buried beneath the oceanic waters. Within its crust, however, were contained forces destined, in progress of time, to lift up the existing islands and continents, marked by all that variety of surface and contour, which at present characterize them. That the Divine Being, at this early epoch, purposed the ultimate elevation of the islands and continents, and that these forces were

inclosed within the earth with special reference to that end, I think no one can doubt. But under this general admission, there may be various opinions as to the extent or comprehensiveness of the Divine purpose, as well as to the specialty of the means relied upon for its accomplishment. One may suppose that only an abode generally suitable for man and the principal animals associated with him, was provided for or intended. The particular details of outline and surface marking the existing continents, he may conceive to have been determined by the character of the agents employed in their elevation. Another may suppose the original plan of the earth, as designed by the Creator, to have included the principal mountain ranges together with the great valleys lying between them, as well as the more important seas, bays, gulfs, and other marginal indentations. He may, with the physical geographer, see in these not only manifest provisions for the due irrigation and drainage of the continents, but intended facilities for their penetration by commerce, civilization and the arts. While yet another may conceive the Divine purpose to have embraced all the details of the earth's present geological and geographical development, to have extended to the minutest features in the outline of every coast, and the configuration of every country — nay, to the very form and position of every pebble upon every sea shore; or even to the combination, place and office at each successive moment, of every atom of matter in the entire globe.

Now I do not think it difficult to determine which of these opinions is to be preferred. The first re-

stricts within too narrow a limit the range of Providence, excluding from it much that is essential to the obvious design and purpose of the existing order of things. The last, on the contrary, extends the range too widely, taking in that which is wholly unimportant — which might be changed in a thousand different ways, and the great ends of creation be equally secured. It is the intermediate view of Providence which is most in harmony with the known character of the Divine government, and most in conformity to all the analogies of human conduct. This supposes the original plan of our world to have embraced all the provisions necessary to constitute it a fit theatre for human probation — the purpose for which it was specially formed — while it leaves whatever has no relation to that end, to be determined by the mere laws of physical development.

The same general rule will apply, though perhaps less clearly in particular cases, to the Providence of God in human affairs. Whatever may be necessary to the accomplishment of His will, in the destinies of individuals, or of nations, we must suppose to be secured by direct provisions, while a multitude of both actions and events, of an unimportant character, are left to take their form and impress from laws ordained with reference to higher ends. To imagine every one of my bodily or mental acts, however humble, and every occurrence of my life, however trifling, the subject of a Divine purpose, is not less absurd or derogatory to the character of God, than the reference of every atomic combination in the natural world to a like purpose. It is not easy, it is true, to draw the line

of separation between what we may suppose to have been designed, and what to have arisen from the action of general causes, without being specially ordered. Nor is such a discrimination necessary. All that is really important, is, that we should avoid, on the one hand, restricting the Divine Providence to a narrowness of range, incompatible with its controlling influence, in nature and human society; and on the other, extending it so as to take in actions and events of too little moment to be regarded as ends in the constitution and government of the world, without offence to the dignity of its author. Within these limits, the actual line of separation may be variously conceived according to the observations, temperament, or peculiar views of the individual.

But is it possible, it may be asked, thus to distinguish between the LITTLE and the GREAT, the IMPORTANT and the UNIMPORTANT, in tracing the operations of Providence? Are they not so closely connected with one another—so interwoven and bound together, that whatever embraces one, must include the other also? Do we not everywhere see the great dependent upon the little, and the important evolved from the unimportant? Was not Rome saved from destruction by the cackling of geese? Did not the fate of Protestant Christianity, when the fleet of William neared the English coast, hang trembling upon a breath of air? Are not our present national prosperity and greatness, as well as the sublime and untold destinies that await us as a people, traceable to the imposition by a British parliament of certain inconsiderable stamp duties? Have not the wonder-

ful advances made in the physical sciences and the innumerable arts dependent upon them during the present century, all sprung from the accidental discovery of oxygen, towards the close of the last, by Doctor Priestley? Or to take an instance of a different character, how often do we see a flame of Christian love and zeal, kindled in the heart by a single spark of Divine truth? And what transformations of character and life are frequently the result of a word fitly spoken, or a thought even seasonably suggested?

Such, indeed, would seem to be a mere statement of familiar and every-day occurrences. And yet, in the face of these and a thousand other similar examples that might be adduced, I will venture to express the belief, that in the moral as well as in the natural world, there is always an exact relation between the magnitude of an event and the forces giving rise to it. In no one of these cases are the real causes of the phenomena alluded to, brought into view. The circumstance upon which they are represented as contingent, was at best but one of the causes concerned in their production, and might, moreover, have been variously replaced without altering at all the general result. No moral or physical event is ever produced by a single agency. There is always a plurality of causes; and that which we commonly regard as the antecedent is not unfrequently one of the least efficient among them. It is only when falling upon the prepared powder, that the spark causes an explosion. It is only when buried in a genial soil, and warmed by the sunshine and watered by the rain and dews of heaven, that the seed germinates. The way was open

for the discovery of oxygen, and had Priestley never lived, it would have been made, as we know, only a few months later, by both Lavoisier and Scheele. The human mind being what it is, the discovery was a necessary consequence of those which had preceded it. Protestant Christianity would have been in substantially the same condition as at present, had the entire fleet of William gone to the bottom. Its real safety, under God, lay in the stout and true hearts of the English people, and so long as the fealty of these remained unshaken, means for its defence would not have been wanting. Both Niebuhr and Gibbon would have had the same task to perform, although an aquatic biped had never lighted upon the Italian peninsula. Impaired interests, alienated affections, and feelings exasperated by an indignant sense of wrong, together with a growing consciousness of power and capacity for independence, were the real causes of the American Revolution. It is not the stubborn, wayward, and obdurate, but hearts which the Holy Spirit has prepared, that words spoken in Christian love and kindness soften, or Divine truth regenerates.

In all these cases, the forces have long been silently, and it may be, secretly operating, preparatory to their manifestation in the final result. This is not unfrequently determined by what would seem to be an accident. Nay, so far as relates to its particular form, and the precise time of its occurrence, it is very often, there is reason to believe, in reality accidental — accidental in the only intelligible sense of the word — that of not being specially designed

and provided for. The fires of *Ætna* are steadily at work beneath the base of the mountain, while around its sides and at its summit all is quiet. Far down below the surface, rock after rock is melted into the huge, burning, boiling caldron. Water is converted into steam, which, pent up within the fiery caverns, presses against their sides with a continually increasing force. Occasional tremblings of the surrounding country, attest its existence and power, though *Ætna* is itself still in profound repose. At length, every resisting barrier gives way before the accumulated pressure, and a vertical column of molten rock ascends the shaft of the volcano. Wherever the walls chance to be weakest, an opening is made, and the lava issuing forth, precipitates itself in a blazing, burning, devastating torrent, down the side of the mountain. Had the walls been stouter at that point, still the general phenomenon would have been the same. The time of the irruption might have been a little delayed, and the stream of lava have broken forth at a greater elevation, and have fallen into a different channel; but the proper ends of the volcano, as connected with the dynamics of the globe, would have been equally accomplished.

And thus is it in every sphere and department of God's Providence. "*De minimis, lex non curat,*" is a maxim of the Divine no less than of human governments. While the great, the true, the real, the essential are secured by agencies and laws pressing on to their accomplishment with the resistlessness of fate, the little, the apparent, the formal, the unessential, are left to follow, in subordination to them, from the general provisions of the system.

I have dwelt the longer upon this point, because I believe that mistake here is frequently the source of practical error. If, without making the proper discriminations, we seek alike in all occurrences for indications of God's will, we are sure to run into folly and delusion, if not to involve ourselves in graver and more serious misfortunes. The Supreme Governor of the world has not written His purposes upon every passing event. Even the more important phenomena transpiring around us, taken by themselves, do not reflect His character. For a knowledge of this, we must look to the manifest design and tendency and spirit of the provisions under which they arise. As He, everywhere, works by means and instruments, it is by the careful observation and study of these, so far as they are disclosed to us, that we may best learn His purposes. The saying of Napoleon, that Divine Providence is commonly on the side of the longest cannon, however irreverently and jestingly uttered, understood in its larger sense, embodies more wisdom and truth, than many a sermon that has been written upon this vexed and much-abused subject.

I am aware, that the view of Divine Providence here presented, may be deemed at variance with the Scripture doctrine — more especially at variance with the teachings of our Saviour. But I do not think that it is so. These teachings, as I believe, find their true and full import in God's intimate knowledge of the condition of all His creatures, His immediate and personal interest in their welfare, together with that general providential care which the nature of His government allows, and which alone is possible under it.

I do not suppose that any one will seriously contend for an interpretation that shall make the number of hairs on the head of a disciple of Christ, the subject of a Divine decree or purpose.* The sparrow, though noticed by our heavenly Father, was still permitted to fall on the ground. And when, in the same conversation, our Saviour would lift his disciples above the fear of what man could do unto them, it is not by assurances of the special care and protection of Heaven — not by promises of supernatural or providential deliverance from the perils which they would have to encounter in his service. These form no part of the argument which he addresses to them. Higher considerations are adduced, and motives of a more controlling character are brought into requisition. He reminds them of a far greater danger than any to which they can be exposed from the anger of men — the danger of displeasing God. “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him.”

The Scriptures undoubtedly teach — and the doctrine is consonant with both reason and experience — that under God’s government no real harm can befall those who love and keep His commandments; that

* The words, “decree” and “purpose,” are here used in their ordinary sense. There is a certain generalized and technical sense, in which every thing, that actually happens, may be said to be embraced in the Divine decrees or purposes. I have avoided, as far as possible, the use of technical expressions, whether derived from physical or theological science.

every condition in which they may be placed, every event and circumstance of their lives, rightly improved, becomes a means of grace and blessing ; or, in the language of the Apostle, that “all things work together for good to them that love God—to them who are called according to his purpose.” But the Scriptures do not, as I believe, teach—nor is such a doctrine in consonance either with reason or with experience—that every event and circumstance in the life of a Christian is specially ordered, for the promotion of his highest good ; that the kinds of prosperity bestowed upon him are such as he may enjoy with the least danger ; and the forms of discipline administered, precisely those which he most needs ; which are adapted to produce the best effect upon his character. Time and chance happen to all men. The laws of physical nature ride over and through individual interests. They have incomparably higher and more general ends to accomplish in the economy of both the natural and the spiritual worlds. Nor is it possible to conceive them so arranged as to secure these ends, and at the same time to minister to every individual of the race, the precise external conditions which shall be most favorable to his moral and physical well-being. To believe that such is their actual arrangement, requires a faith not less courageous and hardy than that professed by Sir Thomas Browne : “Credo, quia impossibile est.”

In the case of every dispensation of God's Providence, whether joyous or afflictive, it is right and proper, and our duty, to inquire, what use we should make of it ? how He would have us behave under it ?

What lessons derive from it? And if the inquiry be reverently and humbly made, we may hope to be guided to a right answer. But beyond this we may not go. Why the event was ordered, what ends it was intended to accomplish, whether it respects chiefly ourselves, or has other and higher relations which determined its form and occurrence — are questions pertaining to the secret things of God — to the immediate purposes of Him who giveth not account of any of His matters. It is vain and useless to ask them.

Against this general method of inquiry concerning the Divine Providence, it may be urged, that as the fact of such a Providence is made known to us only in the Scriptures, we should look to them exclusively for a knowledge of its mode and its limitations; that Revelation, being in its subject-matter above the reason, it furnishes no appropriate field for the exercise of that faculty; that although we are unable to conceive how the stream of physical events can in any instance be turned from its proper channel, without disturbance of natural laws, or how these laws can maintain constantly the order and stability of the universe, and at the same time lend themselves everywhere as pliant instruments in its moral government — both may nevertheless be entirely possible. Our powers of conception, it may be added, are extremely limited. What seems to us difficult or impossible even, may be perfectly easy to God. It becomes us, therefore, to submit our weak and puny intelligence to His higher wisdom, and receive with an unquestioning faith whatever His word reveals to us.

In the presence of an audience, such as I have the honor to address, I need not say that this is mere whining and cant and drivel, utterly unworthy of the book in support of whose claims it is offered — utterly unworthy of the head or the heart of any true man or good Christian. As if, forsooth, it were possible to have any higher authority than the clearly pronounced decisions of the reason! * As if this were not the only faculty — I include the moral as well as the intellectual endowment — by which we are able to distinguish between right and wrong — between truth and error! As if the Bible itself did not every where recognize it, and constantly appeal to it, and derive, in the last analysis, all its sanctions from it! As if granting the possibility of a revelation independently of the reason, such a revelation would be of the slightest value to us! As if, after having received it, we should be any thing but a vessel having a chart indeed, but without rudder or compass to steer by. Let us ever beware of the sin and folly of disparaging the reason. It is the only high and God-like endowment possessed by us — the only attribute in which man still bears the image of his Maker. Seek not to degrade and humble it; but bow in willing submission to its rightful authority. It is the voice of God speaking within you. Every one of its utterances

* A well attested revelation must command our belief in matters above the reason, as well as where, from the *complexity* of the data, although singly comprehended by the reason, its decisions are hesitating and doubtful. But on subjects coming within the proper sphere of the reason, no revelation, however strongly attested, can command our belief in opposition to the clear and distinct affirmations of that faculty. Only doubt and uncertainty can emerge from the conflict of two equal and opposing authorities.

carries with it the Divine sanction. Whatever we learn from other sources is at best but knowledge at second hand. It has authority, and demands our reception and confidence only as it comes with credentials recognized by the intelligence. Veil this light within, and you have nothing without but mist and obscurity. Extinguish it, and you are at once and forever enveloped in profound darkness. Disparage the reason — deny its paramount authority, and you cut off the only arm by which you hold on to the plank of truth floating upon a boundless ocean of possibilities. From the free air and sunlight of day, you go down, down into the gloomy depths of a fathomless, bottomless scepticism.

Employ the moral scalpel upon the human heart as freely as you choose. Fearlessly lay bare its quivering fibres of sentiment and belief. From that which is sound and healthy, dissect with an unflinching hand whatever is of morbid or abnormal growth. But destroy not the heart itself. Let that, healed and regenerate, still send forth to every part of the frame the streams of life and sensibility. Throw into the intellectual cupel every form of opinion. Raise the heat and press the blast until the pure golden truth, freed from the dross of error, shines forth with dazzling brightness. But preserve entire and unharmed the cupel, or all your labor will be in vain. Defend, with a strong arm, the oracles of God. So far as they are entrusted to your keeping, guard them with a jealous care. Suffer them not to be corrupted by the deceits of a vain philosophy. Uphold them against the oppositions of science, falsely so called.

Meet, with indignant and withering rebuke, the jests of the profane and the cavils of unbelief, when directed towards them. But set them not at variance with the intelligence. Bring them not into collision with the plain teachings of common sense and common experience. If your faith be in conflict with the clearly ascertained laws of nature, or the well-established principles of science — which are only the inductions of a larger experience — you will do well to modify it. If you continue the unequal contest, you are sure in the end to be beaten. The ever active spirit of investigation, and the continually growing developments of knowledge resulting from it, cannot be restrained by the fetters of a creed. As well might you hope to bind leviathan with threads of gossamer, or stop the fiery steed to which the car has been harnessed by modern invention, by placing your hand upon it, or by simply looking at it. Interpretation has always, in the end, yielded to the demands of advancing science, however long it has struggled against them; and it always must yield. Nor are the interests of piety and religion in danger of permanently suffering from it. The truth, although for a time depressed, it may be, at length, detached from the leaden weight of error that bore it down, is seen floating still more buoyantly upon the surface. Resist not progress in any of the paths of human inquiry. There is surely every where need enough of more knowledge. If the light pain you, it is because your eyes are weak or diseased. Give the necessary attention to them; but do not attempt to put out the sun. In your zeal for the interests of Christian truth, do

not exalt the Scriptures at the expense of the reason. Remember that the latter is the elder daughter of Heaven. At least, pay her equal honors. "Exalt her, and she shall promote thee. She shall bring thee to honor when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thy head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver unto thee."

It may be further urged against the aim and purpose of these views, that the belief in a Divine Providence immediately directing every event of our lives — directing it too with special reference to our good, while it affords support and consolation in seasons of affliction, brings us at all times nearer to God, and renders comparatively easy that confidence and trust in Him, which is the duty of every Christian. It should not therefore be wantonly disturbed, it may be said, although the doctrine be not expressly taught in the Scriptures, and not easily reconcilable, indeed, with the known constitution of the outward world.

Did I suppose there to be anything better than TRUTH, or did I believe with Sir William Hamilton, that "in its chase, as in others, the PURSUIT is all in all, and the SUCCESS comparatively nothing," I would not have troubled you with this already too protracted discussion. Did I suppose, as many, in these latter days assert, that in matters of religion, FEELING and SENTIMENT are all in all, and the BELIEFS which underlie them comparatively nothing; or did I believe right feelings and sentiments towards God to be possible, without right conceptions of His character and government, I would still have kept silence. But I

do not so read the Bible. I do not so read the human heart, or so understand human life. Religion is not a mere matter of speculation, not yet a thing of simple feeling. In both its interests and its objects it is eminently practical. And if I understand rightly the laws of conduct, all wise action has its basis in sound judgments: and sound judgments suppose true and accurate perceptions, as well as just sentiments; and just sentiments imply right ideas of the objects awakening them. Any important error, therefore, though it be of the head only, must affect, in some degree at least, the heart and the life. A faith extending the Divine Providence further than the Scriptures warrant, — further than the experience of mankind justifies, or the laws of nature allow even, cannot be harmless. It must exert an influence both upon the feelings and the conduct more or less prejudicial. I believe such a faith to be unfriendly to exalted piety, or to heroic and god-like action and endurance. So far as it is operative it vitiates the practical judgments, dwarfs the intelligence, and tends to the formation of a narrow and egoistic type of Christian character.

Wisdom is a higher endowment and virtue than simple goodness; and the very first condition of true wisdom is to see things as they are. Folly is punished, in this world at least, by severer penalties than sin; and what so fruitful source of folly, as recognizing in the ordinary occurrences of life, special indications of God's will, mistaking the accidental suggestions of our own minds for the immediate promptings of His Spirit, and in any proposed enterprise, public or private, religious, philanthropic or secular, building our expect-

tations of success upon the Divine aid and favor, instead of the fulfilment of its appointed conditions, as learned from history and experience. Not to speak of the different forms of fanaticism, by which the individual has been deluded, or society torn, or the earth even desolated — all originating in this source — how often, in the ordinary pursuits of life, do we see the exertions of pious and persevering industry fail of their proper rewards, because the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light! How frequently are we compelled to witness, if not the entire failure, the very partial success of benevolent and Christian enterprises, from the want of sounder practical judgments in their conception and conduct! How repeatedly, in the history of nations, have the hopes of liberty been dashed to the earth by premature efforts for its establishment, in reliance upon the justice of the cause and the favor of Heaven, to the neglect of that maxim of worldly prudence, to which our Saviour refers in illustrating true heavenly wisdom. “What king going to make war with another king, sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?”

The principle and spirit of this maxim cannot with safety be disregarded in any of the enterprises of life. However good or desirable the object, suitable and adequate means must be provided for its accomplishment. Right intentions and worthy aims are not alone sufficient. They must be supported by earnest and persevering effort; and that effort must,

moreover, be wisely directed. The end no more renders efficient inadequate, than it sanctifies unholy means. If we labor for the accomplishment of God's own purposes, it must be in God's own way, or we labor in vain. Only in so far as our plans are formed, and our efforts put forth in accordance with His laws, does He accept of our services in carrying forward His designs. There can be no greater error than to suppose that He looks only to the motives; and that if these be right He will prosper and succeed our endeavors, however directed. Besides right motives, He requires of us, in proportion to our means of knowledge, both right and wise conduct. If we neglect or overlook this latter requirement, He will not interpose and vary His laws, to prevent the failure of our undertaking, or to shield us from the proper consequences.

Besides its tendency to impair the practical judgments, this same error can hardly fail to exert an influence unfavorable to the higher virtues and graces of character. If all the events and circumstances of my life have been specially ordered by God, for the promotion of my highest good, there can surely be little merit on my part in willingly submitting to them. This is true, though many of the dispensations of His Providence, designed for correction and discipline, may be afflictive, and, for the time, hard to be borne. "For what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? But if, when ye do well and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable to God. For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving

us an example, that we should follow in his steps." There is no real surrender — no true forgetting, of self, in suffering, experienced on account of personal losses, or endured with the expectation of personal benefit. It is the sacrifice of our own interests for the good of others — the giving up of our own desires and wishes for the pleasure of others — and not the mere patient foregoing of present ease for future advantage — that helps to conquer and subdue the inherent egoism of our natures. Submission to the will of God, because it is His will — because such submission is right, and proper, and becoming us, as His creatures — because His will itself is perfect goodness, and because its appointments, although including much partial and incidental evil, all look ultimately to the securing of the best interests of His universe — is far more improving to us, and must be far more acceptable to Him, than a submission springing, however indirectly, from considerations of self. In the language of the author of the immortal Analogy, whose mind appears to me to have been gifted with a purer percipience of truth, than any other with whose productions I am acquainted, and whose pre-eminent ability as an ethical philosopher, if I mistake not, was chiefly due to his power of seeing things as they are, without the distortions of prejudice and passion — in the language of Bishop Butler, "A right behavior under affliction, recollecting ourselves so as to consider it in the view in which religion teaches us to consider it, as from the hand of God; receiving it as what He appoints or thinks proper to permit in His world and under His government — this will habi-

tuates the mind to a dutiful submission; and such submission, together with the active principle of obedience, make up the temper and character in us, which answers to His sovereignty, and which absolutely belongs to the condition of our being as dependent creatures." "Nor can it be said," he adds, "that this is only breaking the mind to a submission to mere power; for mere power may be accidental and precarious and usurped; but it is forming within ourselves, the temper of resignation to His rightful authority, who is by nature supreme over all."

It is true, that we love God because He first loved us. But if the love of gratitude be the only offering which we render Him, we come far short of that spiritual worship which He of right demands of us. More than this, indeed, is required towards our fellow-men. "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? sinners also love those that love them." With one who has just and adequate conceptions of God's character, and whose heart is rightly affected by them, the mere sense of personal favors is lost in the deep tide of religious emotion that swells his bosom. He is conscious that his own being and capacity for enjoyment and suffering constitute a theatre infinitely too narrow for the display of the Divine perfections. Instead of placing himself in the centre of the universe, and seeing in all its arrangements special reference to his good, he bows down in adoration of that boundless goodness which enfolds in its embrace the entire assemblage of created intelligences, and in which he himself, however unworthy, is graciously permitted to share. He beholds,

indeed, many things in the circumstances of his own life, and in the condition of those around him, which he could wish different. But he does not regard these as immediately ordered by God, or as specially indicating His will. He sees in them only results flowing incidentally from provisions, not only in design and purpose, but in actual operation, in the highest degree beneficent. And instead of wondering at the permission of evil in the world, he is lost in admiration of the wisdom as well as the goodness displayed in its constitution and government—a constitution and government securing to every individual of the race, all the conditions necessary for a just moral probation, and giving to so large a number that probation, under circumstances most favorable to its successful issue. So far from ascribing to the immediate appointment of God, whatever, in the condition of those around him, is unfriendly to their happiness or their virtue, he believes himself under obligation to do all in his power for its removal. And in thus laboring for the accomplishment of such of the Divine ends, as the general laws governing the world have failed to secure, he is not disposed to exact terms or conditions of service. His obedience springs not from the recollection of past favors, nor yet from the hope of future benefits. He loves the service. It is his meat and his drink to do the will of his heavenly Father. He rejoices in being permitted a part, however humble, in carrying forward His wise and benevolent designs. The language of his heart is, “Not my will, but thy glory—not my ease or pleasure or happiness, but the good of thy universe. I am thine. Thou hast a

perfect right to command me. Use the feeble instrumentality of my efforts as Thou seest best. It is enough that I know Thee to be good, and may trust in Thee."

There is another reason why we should not voluntarily suffer any form of error to attach itself to the doctrines of Christianity, and go forth under their sanction, to which I would briefly allude. However harmless or beneficial even, such error may for a time appear, it is sure in the end to work mischief. Like the little book of the angel in the Apocalypse, though sweet in the mouth, it will make the belly bitter. Even though its direct influence on the heart and the life be not prejudicial, it will prove an obstacle in the way of the general reception of the doctrine with which it is associated. To the sincere and earnest inquirer after truth, it becomes a stumbling-block, while to the enemies of our holy religion, it serves as a mark for the direction of their shafts. The Christian minister, who, by his eloquence and fervid zeal, spreads erroneous doctrines through the Churches, does more to harm Christianity than a hundred infidels. Besides furnishing its adversaries with their most potent weapons against it, he is himself scattering broadcast, the seeds from which scepticism and unbelief will, sooner or later, spring up. Indeed, blows aimed at Christianity through the false views connected with its teachings, not unfrequently render it an actual service. The error is detached from the truth by the vigor of the stroke, and the latter goes forward, unclogged and unencumbered, on its heavenly and divine mission.

The corruptions of the Romish Church in France, during the early part of the last century, were the hot-bed, from which, in the latter half, infidelity and irreligion shot up into so rank and luxuriant a growth. Had a pure form of Christianity existed there, instead of the debasing superstitions, bearing its name and usurping its authority, the frightful scenes of bloodshed and social disorder, which give so painful an interest to that period of French history, would never, it is probable, have been enacted. They relate an anecdote of Voltaire even, which would seem to indicate, that the bitter hostility of that prince of scoffers to the religion of Jesus, may have sprung as much from the repugnance of his understanding to the degrading puerilities that were connected with it, as from the opposition of his heart to its moral teachings. Desirous of seeing the sun rise from the top of one of the hills in the neighborhood of his residence at Ferney, he set out while it was yet dark, with lanterns, a single companion and a guide. The way was long, and the ascent difficult for one upon whom the weight of more than fourscore years was pressing. Already the day began to dawn, and the summit was still distant. Supporting himself upon the arm of his guide, and pressing forward, he arrived just as the sun was emerging from the distant horizon. The grandeur of the scene which opened upon his view inspired him with profound reverence. He uncovered his head, and prostrated himself in silent worship. When he was able to speak, his words were a hymn, uniting the enthusiasm of poetry with the fervor of devotion. At length he suddenly arose, replaced his hat, brush-

ed the dust from his knees, and regarding the sublime spectacle with a changed expression of countenance, said, "Quand à Monsieur le Fils et à Madame sa mère, c'est une autre affaire." Would a contrast so disparaging to Him by whom the worlds were made, have presented itself to a mind upon which there had ever dawned a conception of our Saviour's true character ?

Although no such fatal consequences as these are to be apprehended from the prevalence of mistaken views in regard to the mode and extent of the Divine Providence, I think it not difficult to see how generally received error, here, may exert an influence upon thoughtful minds greatly to be deprecated. Let us suppose a man, whose ideas of the character and government of God have been formed chiefly from the observation of His works. He has seen, that in the natural world events occur in a definite and fixed order, so that any antecedent being given, he may with certainty infer its consequent. He knows that it is upon this fundamental fact, or law, that the sciences, relating to such events, are built up ; and that without it, the most enlarged experience would have no value as a guide to action. He can, therefore, no more doubt the wisdom and benevolence of the law as a part of the Divine Government, than he can doubt its reality.

He has further observed, that in the bodily organization of man, the structure and endowments of the several parts obviously have in view the good of the individual. Disease and suffering, it is true, are incident to the general plan upon which he is constituted ;

but these nowhere appear as the object of contrivance and design. On the contrary, their occurrence is guarded against by numerous checks and hindrances, and when they have actually arisen, the evil is met, as far as possible, by remedial provisions. The wisdom and benevolence of the Creator are, therefore, here equally apparent.

He has further observed, in the intellectual and moral constitution of man, features which look beyond the mere securing of happiness, to the higher ends of virtue and goodness. As in the preceding case, these ends are not, in every instance, realized; or in any, indeed, so perfectly as could be desired, or as might beforehand have been deemed possible. He sees, however, in the endowments of our nature, manifest provisions for their attainment; while the liability of failure in respect to them, so far as he can understand, is necessarily incident to the conditions of moral action. He concludes, therefore, that the Author of the Universe is characterized by a love of right, and a disposition to promote it, as well as by the attributes of wisdom and benevolence.

Now let such a man be told, that although God has subjected the natural world to fixed and invariable laws, He nevertheless every where shapes the events arising under them, so as to meet the requirements of His moral government. Let him be further told, that every thing which transpires in our world is immediately ordered by God, and in perfect accordance with His will — that evil is as really provided for, as much the object of contrivance and design, as good — that suffering and sin spring as directly

from the constitution of things, and must have been as truly intended, as happiness and virtue. Carry these ideas of God's Providence to their legitimate consequences, by unfolding to him, as found in books of systematic theology, and as still occasionally presented from the pulpit, the doctrines of foreordination, election, and reprobation.* Tell him that the object of the Divine Being, in creating the world, was the illustration of His own attributes, and not the good of His creatures; that He forms and makes use of them, in whatever way may best subserve that end, wholly ignoring any claim which they might be supposed to have upon Him as their Creator. And, to complete and give consistency to this view of the Divine character and government, add a discourse on the glory of God, and the joy of His saints in the sufferings of the finally lost — sufferings which He had predetermined, and rendered escape from impossible. Let all this, I say, be told to a man such as I have supposed, and what effect would it be likely to have upon him? If he received it as the simple teaching of the Scriptures, might it not lead him to question their authority? Would it be strange if his confidence in them, as a revelation from Heaven, should be shaken by it?

It will be perceived that the doctrines maintained in this discussion, so far as they are at all peculiar, grow out of a discrimination between the Divine ends,

* The foreordination of evil, not as necessarily incident to the plan of creation, but as voluntarily incorporated in it. Election and reprobation, not as *determined by* character, but as *determining* character.

and collateral results flowing from the means employed in their attainment. Now it may be supposed, that such a distinction, though right and proper in considering the products of human labor and skill, is wholly out of place and unmeaning, in relation to the works of God. The use of means for the attainment of an end, it may be said — and more especially of means attaining the end but imperfectly, and carrying in their train, not unfrequently, much that is in conflict with it — is incompatible with the idea of a Being of infinite power. Either, it may be urged, God did not wish our world to be the theatre of more perfect happiness, or more perfect virtue than it actually exhibits, or He was unable to make it so. We must necessarily suppose a limitation of either the WILL or the POWER.

Although by no means admitting the existence of the dilemma, in the sense intended as implying deficiency on the part of God,* yet were it forced upon me, I should not hesitate to choose the horn which would leave untouched His moral perfections. Indeed, if I mistake not, we are accustomed to be unwarrantably free in our assumptions in regard to His natural attributes. So far as our knowledge of them is gained from the outward creation, as in any other inductive syllogism, we can gather no more in the conclusion than is given in the premises. And yet in violation of this obvious principle, and without, as I think, any proper scriptural authority, and without

* It is no limitation of the power of God to suppose that He cannot do that which in the nature of things is impossible.

knowing at all, whether the thing supposed, be in itself possible, we assume that the Creator, if he had so chosen, might have formed us with all our capacities for enjoyment, unaccompanied by the liability to suffering at present attending them. We assume that, if He had so chosen, He might have formed us with our present capacities for virtue and holy obedience without the liability to sin attending them. And because such is not our constitution, we proceed to modify our views of the ends for which we were created. We conclude that happiness and virtue, to which all the endowments of our nature so clearly point, can at best hold but a subordinate place among them.*

Now I protest against this whole course of reasoning. I protest against it not only as illogical, but as a kind of reasoning to which the human mind is wholly incompetent. I protest against it as leading to conclusions which put the theology of the head at variance with that of the heart, and furnish the chief ground of the apparent conflict between man's moral sentiments and the revealed facts of his condition and destinies. The truth is, we are utterly unable to say *à priori*, what is, and what is not possible — what God can do, and what He cannot do. All our knowledge of Him is derived from the Bible, from the teachings of our own moral natures, or from the revelations which He has been pleased to make of himself in the world around us. We cannot add to it by any form of abstract reasoning. Neither can we, with

* See Appendix, Note D.

safety, make it the basis of such reasonings. When the forms of infinity with which we are most familiar, — which we can do most towards comprehending — time, space and number — are forced into the syllogism, they only mock us with contradiction and absurdity. How then can we hope to derive just conclusions from premises incomparably more remote from our finite powers of understanding? We may reason from what God has done, to what He probably will do. This is the argument from analogy. We may reason from causes now in operation to their probable results. This is the argument from tendency. We may reason from the provisions observed in the natural and moral worlds, to the ends designed to be accomplished by them. This is the argument from final cause. We may reason from the purposes of God as revealed in the Scriptures, to their ultimate fulfilment. We then proceed upon faith. But we cannot reason from what He is, to what He will do — from the Divine nature to the Divine conduct.

GRANTED the most highly endowed mind ever bestowed upon mortal; give to that mind the fullest comprehension of the creative intelligence of which it might be deemed capable; could it DEDUCE the actual creation? Would the material universe stand out before it? Would the celestial spaces unveil to it their sublimities? or the earth give back from the depths of the past, the marvels of which it has been the theatre? With what pretension to reason, then, can we infer from the goodness of God — as is frequently done — that all moral and physical evil will be ultimately banished from his dominions? Or how

can we rationally conclude from his unlimited power, that every thing which occurs in our world is in accordance with his will? — that sin and suffering if not pleasing in his sight, are at least indifferent to Him? — that otherwise He would have prevented their occurrence, either by the direct interposition of his power, or by adequate constitutional provisions? Or having gathered from a wide induction his beneficent designs in the creation of our world, how can we draw inferences at variance with these designs from their imperfect fulfilment? On what intuition or revelation do we rest the postulate, that every thing which He desires and makes provision for, will certainly come to pass — no matter what the character of the agents upon which its accomplishment is made dependent? We surely have no knowledge that will justify such an assumption. On the contrary; what we have learned of the natural world as well as the course of human society, would lead to a directly opposite conclusion. Indeed, it is hardly possible to conceive a sterner or more pointed rebuke to this whole strain of logical folly — not to characterize it by a harsher designation — than is administered by every new disclosure of the physical sciences. These successive revelations of the works and ways of God, not only show how unlike has been the actual putting forth of his power to any thing which we should have imagined, but throw yet more and stronger light upon the simple goodness that has every where prompted and guided it. They, moreover, make us further acquainted with the amazing difficulties that were to be encountered, in carrying out his beneficent designs,

as well as disclose more fully the wonderful contrivances made subservient to them. The difficulties, so far as we are able to see, are inherent and necessary, while the contrivances are clearly appended for the purpose of meeting them. Thus, every new door which is opened into the Creator's works shuts us up more closely to the conclusion, that if the ends manifestly had in view, are not always attained, it is from no lack of will or care on His part.

When, therefore, I read in the endowments of their organic and spiritual natures, the declaration that God would have all men virtuous and happy, I shall believe it, notwithstanding the sad prevalence of every form of evil which I observe around me. When the Scriptures inform us that God would have all men come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved, I will trust the gracious assurance, although I dare derive from it no hope of their *actual* salvation.

Let us ever cling to this great central truth of Christianity — this corner-stone of all faith and all religion — the perfect moral integrity of God's character — his simple, impartial, unselfish goodness — his sacred regard for justice and right — his love to all his creatures, demonstrated and made manifest by his unsparing provisions for their welfare. It is the Alpha and Omega of the Scriptures — the beginning and the end of their teachings. Every sentiment of our moral nature responds to it; while the innumerable voices which come from without us, all unite in its affirmation. Disguise or cover over in any manner this truth, whether by the idea of a Divine Providence immediately determining every human action and

event, or by the supposition of their equally universal PRE-determination — whether by abstract reasonings as to what God might have done, or by erroneous conceptions of what He actually has done, or of the motives which prompted it; and you diminish by so much the power of the Gospel. Shut out of view this truth, by substituting for the requirement of true, spiritual worship, the mere observance of outward forms and ceremonies, and you take from our holy religion all that distinctively belongs to it. But let the doctrine of God's moral perfections have the pre-eminence which the Scriptures every where give to it — let it bend to the requirements of no creed — let it yield to the demands of no human infirmity — let it be held up, as taught in the Bible, and more especially as illustrated and exemplified in the provisions of the Gospel — and Christianity shall go forth conquering and to conquer, without stay or hindrance, until this revolted world shall be brought back to God — until “the heathen shall be given to his Son for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession.”

APPENDIX.

NOTE A.

THAT the physical sufferings of mankind have been greatly multiplied and aggravated by the disobedience of moral laws, there can be no question. But that all natural evil has its origin in sin, is by no means so clear. We know that it existed in our world long before sin entered it. The innumerable tribes of lower animals, which by so many ages preceded man on the earth, were organized on precisely the same principles as those at present inhabiting it. Indeed, so analogous were they in respect to the types even, upon which they were modeled, that every ascertained species has taken its place under classes and orders established for living races. The external conditions under which they existed, must have been in all essential respects, the same as those which now prevail. They were exposed to like accidents, as the imperfectly repaired limbs and members so frequently met with in their organic remains, abundantly prove. Carnivorous races preyed upon herbivorous, and death everywhere reigned then as it does now. The idea, therefore, at one time so generally received, that a radical change was wrought in the constitution of matter, extending its influence to the entire organic and physical creations, in consequence of the sin of our first parents, is no longer admissible. We may still suppose, it is true, that God, foreseeing the introduction of sin, originally conferred upon the elements composing our world a *vitiated* constitution, in order that in their organic forms they might become the instruments of its punishment; and thus imposed the necessity of suffering upon the lower animals from the beginning. But the supposition is loaded with too great improbabilities, especially as viewed by the naturalist, to be for a moment entertained, unless absolutely required by the Scriptures.

NOTE B.

We must suppose provisions to have been made in the original constitution of our world for all the ends to which it was intended to minister. Besides securing to the innumerable tribes of animals with which it was to be filled, appropriate spheres and conditions of existence, we must suppose these provisions, as far as was compatible with this their primary design, and with the very general character of the laws in which they were embodied, to have looked forward to the accomplishment of God's moral purposes in connection with our race. In this way must we suppose the agencies of physical nature to be wrought into the economy of His providence.

But if all natural events, it may be said, flow out of the original constitution of the globe, along one unbroken line of antecedents and consequents, although embraced in the Divine Providence, they cannot with propriety be made subjects of prayer. Such a conclusion, however, by no means follows. Any future event in which we are interested and concerning which the will of God is unknown to us, is a legitimate subject for petition. It makes no difference in this respect, though the event may have been predetermined by Him from the foundation of the world. Nor is there any difficulty in supposing prayers for events already certain, answered. We have only to conceive provision made for their answer in the constitution of things. Then the settled and unvarying character of that constitution, instead of presenting an obstacle in the way of the answer, becomes its guarantee. Whether prayers for natural events — as rain for instance — are answered, is simply a question of fact to be settled by extended observation and by the teaching of the Scriptures.

NOTE C.

Do not the same difficulties, it may be asked, attend the supposition of Divine interpositions in the moral, as in the natural world? I think not. That which creates the difficulty in the one case, is wanting in the other; viz. invariability of manifestation. Did the same mind always act, under the same circumstances, in precisely

the same manner — did the same truths presented to it at different times, produce invariably the same effects, then there would be no room for the supposition of Divine interpositions, modifying the mental phenomena. Or were matter like mind, subject to moods — did the same powder, for example, under the same circumstances, at one time kindle from the warmth of the hand, and at another time require for its ignition the temperature of molten iron — did it now explode with the most terrific violence, and now in passing into the gaseous state, scarcely disturb the air, there would be no difficulty in the supposition of Divine interpositions in material phenomena. On the contrary, the idea of such interpositions would naturally be suggested.

NOTE D.

Having examined a steam engine, and seen it in operation, I come to the conclusion that it was constructed for the generation of force. I infer this, because I see force actually generated by it — because the form, structure, and connections of the several parts, manifestly look to that result, and find their explanation in it — because the generation of force is an intelligible and worthy end. Nor is this conclusion at all affected by the observation that the practically available force of the engine is materially diminished by friction. The friction is in no proper sense of the word, *provided* for. It does not appear as the object of contrivance and design. There is nothing in the structure of the engine looking to it, as an end. On the contrary, I observe at different points, provisions for reducing it as far as possible, by the introduction of lubricating fluids. Nor would my conclusion as to the purpose of the engine, be in the slightest degree shaken, could it be shown that by the employment of more expensive materials, and the adoption of a different plan of construction, a part of the friction might have been avoided.

By a similar inductive process we arrive at the conclusion, that man was constituted for virtue and happiness. And for like reasons, this conclusion is not in the slightest degree affected by the observed prevalence of suffering and sin. Nor would it be at all modified, or suffer a jot of abatement in force, could it be

shown that under a different constitution of things — by substituting, for instance, every where, the immediate and special exertion of the Divine power, in place of a government carried on by general agencies, under general laws — many existing evils might have been prevented. Other and greater evils, for ought we could know, might follow such a change. Neither can we be certain that the mode of the Divine government respects ourselves alone. It may have a yet stronger relation to the Divine nature and attributes.

Whether God could not have organized man so as to exclude the possibility of suffering, and given him a moral nature without the liability to sin — or whether, the plan of his constitution being what it now is, the evils arising from these sources might not have been checked and limited to a greater extent than we actually see them, are questions which lie wholly without the range of the present inquiry. Nor are they referred to for any other purpose than to ward off objections drawn from unwarrantable assumptions in respect to them.

There are a large number of theological questions clustering about the two main points of this inquiry — many of them presenting great difficulties — concerning which I wish it to be distinctly understood, that I say, and have intended to say, nothing. And I ask that any terms or expressions looking in these directions — if I have chanced to employ such — may be interpreted in accordance with the declared aim and purpose of the discussion.